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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to combine selected research literature concerned with early and advanced sensorimotor development in black children, and the institutional management of their natural precocity. The first section briefly reviews selected literature about sensorimotor development in black children. The second section discusses the current use of medication. The last section discusses specific implications of selected knowledge acquisition patterns of black children. It is concluded that there seems to be four alternative courses of action which school personnel are likely to put into motion in dealing with black children who are too active to learn comfortably in the established school order. Rather than reexamine modes of teaching/learning styles for possible modification, the education establishment prefers to (1) assign children to special learning centers where only minimal learning is expected, or (2) prescribe drugs to render children affectless, (3) completely separate children from their school environment by suspension, or (4) don't do anything; keep things the way they are. These courses of action are demanding and hurtful. The fifth is to apply a humanistic, open individualized learning situation for all students. (Author/JM)

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Towards A Theory Of Selected Knowledge Acquisition Patterns Among Black Children

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Towards a Theory of Selected Knowledge
Acquisition Patterns Among Black Children

Harry Morgan
February, 1976

The probability that black children exceed their white counterparts in sensorimotor development, very early in life, has surfaced in child development circles on isolated occasions. Knowledge of early and advanced sensorimotor development among black neonates has been with us for sometime. The notion has never generated a level of concern strong enough to withstand the onslaught of disbelievers--or the backlash of those who believe that the reverse is true. Why this is true is the larger problem area worthy of many further investigations by researchers. Etiological questions related to the early and advanced sensorimotor status of black children, however, will not be addressed at this time. The occasional research projects and clinical observations detailing differentiated sensorimotor development among black neonates, have never been collected in a single writing. Evidence supporting the notion of advanced sensorimotor development in black children, will be presented here. Thus, this paper will bring together these projects and observations, the current use of medication for sensorimotor management in schools, the so called "third grade syndrome"

and a few suggested avenues for educational policy decision-making with their implications.

There is a desirable flow of development which is suggested by presenting these ideas in this pattern. I propose a parenting and sibling style of active interaction which will extend to a growing child's playmates and peer choice network. This model of active intervention needs support from classroom teachers, and they in turn need backup from a formalized educational policy. As a result of this model, major cognitive gains will tend to accrue at an increasing rate for low income black children when implemented.

In my view there are three basic reasons why this concept has not received active attention. One, of course, is that many scientists in human growth and development are reluctant to discuss differentiated characteristics of humans which might be attributed to genetic transference. The research in Nazi Germany to prove Jewish inferiority, and our own deliberate mismanagement of intelligence testing during the 1920's to keep certain immigrant groups out, set the boundaries for many bitter memories. The recent myriad emotional responses to the work of Dr. Arthur Jensen, has served to further darken this domain. These reactions were of course understandable since one of the notions put forth by Jensen (1969) suggested that black children have lower I.Q. scores because they are genetically inferior to white children.

The second reason is much more subtle and will naturally be met with some strong well placed denials. The basic research which discovered the differentiated development between European and Black infants was done in the 1950's by a woman, Dr. Marcelle Geber. The Geber hypothesis was supported by similar research in the 1960's by Dr. Mary D. Ainsworth, another woman. At that time the scientific community in gereral withheld total approval from women in science. This conditional regard varied somewhat. That is, female scientists were viewed with fewer reservations if they selected parenting, childhood or infancy as major research interests.

The third reason is one that seems to find its way into the very fabric of everything we do in this country--racism. By now, even the general public is aware of the extent to which this eroding reality dominates our daily lives. Its devastating consequences need no more reinforcement in this writing.

So, the goal of this paper is to interblend selected research literature concerned with early and advanced sensorimotor development in black children, and the institutional management of their natural precocity, to enable the implementation of "rational" educational policy decisions. The first section will briefly review selected literature of sensorimotor development in black children. The second section will concern itself with the current use of medication for sensorimotor

management of selected black children in educational institutions. Finally, the last section will discuss the so called "third grade syndrome", and specific implications of selected knowledge acquisition patterns of Black children. Hopefully, this will set the stage for educational policy discussions and further research which reflect the sensorimotor needs of a large number of black children.

Early and Advanced Sensorimotor Development

Historically, Géber's (1960) first reports of advanced development in African neonates were from her observations of mothers and their babies in rural communities. A major aspect of her discovery pointed out a parenting style of socially active intimacy. For a period of approximately 36 months this interaction seemed to promote a sensorimotor development superior to similar development in European infants.

> ...clinical observations of African children in the first year of life had already shown that the accepted "milestones" of development-raising the head, sitting, standing, walking, and so on--were passed at an earlier age than in European children. (Géber, 1960, p. 1216).

As Géber's involvement became more intense she was able to explore some causative factors. She identified a high level of social interaction between the child and his environment. Breast feeding was the common practice and this occured whenever the infant demonstrated a wish for it.

Infants were encouraged to interact with other family members and visitors. They were never confined to cribs, but allowed to move about the home using whatever means were available to them commensurate with their stage of development. Sleep seemed to be the only common occurrence which excluded them from family socializing.

The accelerated development was not solely in the locomotor domain. Ainsworth (1956) recorded language development and identified four-syllable vocalization in infants with a mean age of 38 weeks. At the end of 36 months there was a diminishing of the mother child interaction and infants were left more on their own. From this point on, it was observed the child developed at a much slower rate.

Ainsworth in testing the Géber hypothesis found the same basic pattern among a different group of African neonates. From her observations, urban children whose parents followed European child rearing patterns did not demonstrate early development. These babies appeared to develop similarly to infants of their parents' European colleagues and neighbors. Géber and Ainsworth suggest that an appropriate interacting environment is crucial to the continuity of high levels of growth among African infants. The absence of this sort of an environment will cause decline among rural children and a leveling off to European norms by some urban African children.

In a study by Brazelton, Koslowski and Tronick (1971) a comparison of sensorimotor development was made between infants born to urban Zambian mothers and those born to an equal number of white American mothers. The problems of urban living in Zambia produced mothers with low protein diets, multiple pregnancies and related infections. As expected, their newborns were observed to be lower in weight and length than the white infants, and generally less healthy. Despite the less than ideal circumstances under which the African infants were born, within a short time (approximately two weeks) they surpassed the white infants in cuddliness, reactivity to stimulation, alertness, social interest and consolability. The African mother's child rearing procedures created an active, energetic set of experiences for their babies. They went about caring for them as if there was not the least doubt that their infants would develop normally. African mothers provided a high contact attentive environment which was seemingly tuned to the infant's genetic ability. When compared to the Zambian mothers, the white mothers had less handling and feeding contact with their infants. White infants and mothers also seemed to follow a pattern of expectation and compatibility even though the early learning environment was very different from their African counterparts. From these observations it appears that development in infancy is influenced by inherited determinants which seem to be related to cultural procedures and social interactions.

Differences in sensorimotor development were also found to exist between American black infants and their white counterparts. Nancy Bayley (1965), in making a comparison of mental and motoric test scores between

black, white and Puerto Rican babies found no significant group differences in mental test scores. The black babies, however, scored higher than the Puerto Rican and white babies on the motor scale.

Superior motor development was observed in American black infants by Pasaminick (1946) to exist through the age of 24 months. He also reported that black and white infants compared equally in other areas of behavioral development. Similar precocity was observed among black babies of Jamaican West Indian parents. Curti and others (1935), reported that these infants surpassed American white infants in reaching certain "milestones" like creeping, standing and walking.

Williams and Scott (1953) in comparing 104 black infants from moderate income families, with 50 infants from low income families, found significant differences between the two groups in motor development. Infants from the low SES families showed a more advanced motor development than those from higher income families. The researchers attributed the differences to child rearing procedures and made a point of rejecting possible "racial" characteristics. The concept of race might well be an inappropriate variable to even consider. If from a random sample we place the darkest and fairest skin person at either end of a continuum, the myriad variations in skin color and hair texture alone would make it an impossible task to delineate a beginning (the point at which one's characteristics can be classified as black), or ending (the point at which one's characteristics can be classified

as white). On the other hand, black identity and low SES occurring together does produce realities of social isolation. Problems of urban schools are often discussed against a backdrop of a heavy concentration of black children from low income families.

Child rearing practices in our country have varied somewhat over the years, having been influenced primarily by middle class norms. Trends which have been known to affect parenting styles have been introduced by child rearing professionals who are read and respected by members of this socioeconomic group. Lower socioeconomic families who are striving for higher status readily adopt attributes which they identify as appropriate to the group(s) above them. Lower socioeconomic people are willing to acquire many such attributes to remove the barriers between themselves and acceptance into the middle class. There are also many things they are willing to forego in order that they might better resemble the more respected middle class. Brazelton, Robey and Collier (1969) who have researched groups of East African and Mayan Indian infants indicate how social forces can dominate a mother's expectations for her newborn.

> ...(Black babies) are strong, they are vigorous and exciting motorically. This is a real problem for black mothers that I take care of...They often equate motor activity with aggression, with things that won't be assimilated into the culture that they are trying

> to assimilate into themselves...I would like to give black mothers a feeling that what they do is important...if the black mother could see the strengths of her baby, and respond to them in a way that makes the baby respond back, she would feel like a better person. If black kids could get the feeling that what they did was important early in childhood...That's what I'd like to give them--a feeling of their own identity.
>
> ...(Black mothers) often equate (their baby's) activity with aggression (being bad)...They see this as bad and they very often talk about it as if they were bad. They cry too much--they are bad; they are too active--they are bad. (Quote by Brazelton, see Rich, 1973)

Spitz and Wolf (1946) and Klaus, Kennell, Plumb and Zvehlke (1970) describe how mothers express their early feelings of love for their newborns during the first hours of face to face encounters. Robson (1967) states that even discrete activity of eye contact transmits significant and potent aspects of warm regard. Mutual unconditional regard is of considerable importance to the child's first encounter with our environment. Pediatricians need to encourage black mothers to support their newborn's precocity by responding to them positively in informal ways (allowing them

to explore the unknown by moving about the floor and not constantly being confined to a crib), and formally (warm regard, transmittal of warmth and support through eye contact, cuddling and firm selective disciplining of negative behavior).

Black mothers who are encouraged to have unrealistic expectations for their child's assimilation may be creating insurmountable obstacles in the pathway toward optimum cognitive potential. Adaptation to present institutional modes should not go unquestioned when such large numbers of children must be expelled from school, drugged or therapeutically grouped for caretaker convenience.

Black mothers ought to be encouraged to play with their babies and share in the enjoyment of active, frequent eye contact, and exciting periods of child rearing. They need to be encouraged to interact with their infant's motor excitement and support their natural capabilities. The mother's reciprocity is vital to a sustained growth environment for their baby because of what appears to be cultural expectations. The infant's rapid buildup early in life can be expected to diminish if through adaptational stress, black parents are forced to bring their family personalities into compliance with the dominant white culture.

Capabilities and a readiness to learn have been identified at birth, or a few hours thereafter, among both black and white newborns.

Zuckerman and Rock (1957) for example, have substantiated the existence of innate capabilities in newborns for organized visual perceptions. It is their view from clinical observation that innate organizing processes of visual perception exist in neonates and undergo environmental modification later on as a part of general growth and development. Goren, Sarty and Wu. (1975) appear to support Zuckerman and Rock. From their clinical observations, newborns responded more appropriately to properly drawn face patterns than to a scrambled or blank facial facsimile. We can therefore deduce that significant learning patterns are already in motion at birth. At this seemingly critical point in an infant's early life, opportunities for learning and teaching ought to be encouraged.

Management through Medication

Over the past decade there has been an increasing use of medication for classroom management purposes. Studies by Rie (1974 and 1975), Gross and Wilson (1974) and assessment studies by Connor (1969) and Davids (1971) suggest a process with stages or steps. Children whose classroom behavior is described as wriggling, turning, incessant talking, impulsiveness and inability to delay gratification are frequently referred to the school physician. At this stage, largely on the basis of the classroom teacher's reporting, such children are diagnosed, hyperkinetic, or as suffering from minimal brain dysfunctional, a learning disorder, or a hyperactive impulse disorder.

The next step in this labelling process is medication. Parents are brought into the picture because under these circumstances their approval is necessary. Parents' knowledge of how schools are run and their general level of sophistication will determine in large part how long it will take to obtain their approval. School authorities have also been known to establish medication as a condition under which they can include or exclude a child from school.

As of this writing over 2 million school children in the United States are on behavior modifying drug therapy. This is not intended as a condemnation of all therapeutic programs using methylohemidate hydrochloride (Ritalin),amphetamines and other chemically related drugs, expecially where competent assessment has been a part of the process. Many in the field are groping for some form of relief for the chronic delinquent, brain damaged, and severly disturbed child and for their caretakers. If competency erodes at any stage of the diagnostic/therapeutic process, too many children who are difficult to fit into our prescribed institutional patterns, who defy our present norms, and who are too bothersome to professionals by reminding them of their failures, are assigned to special treatment solely for professional convenience.

Many urban black children who are unable to conform to school rules (which for them are unrealistic), fall into this category. One result is that their energy is released in an atmosphere of hostile punitive backlash.

I am suggesting that initially, these children's use of energy in this way is not intended to be chaotic or disruptive but strategic to their style of learning. School designed patterns of knowledge delivery need to expand the number of ways that knowledge can properly be disseminated by the educator, and received and synthesized by the learner. All too often, the interaction between the active child's use of motor energy, and the school's common reaction to it, inadvertently compels a miniature battleground. These particular points will be discussed further in the section on policy.

There is need for further research to explore various modes of teaching strategies and classroom management as alternatives to drug therapy even for children who are chronically difficult to manage. Pope (1970) has observed that unmedicated children diagnosed as hyperactive were as well controlled as normal children when they were assigned tasks which involved well planned forms of stimulation and were pleasurable. Rie (1974) found that if one sensitized its caretakers to the cognitive and affective needs of children, their undesirable activity could be decreased without the use of drugs. Thus, the problem can be seen as philosophical or political--What do we change, the client or the institution?

The state-of-the-art concerned with client modification has not reached a level of unequivocal justification. Rie (1974) and Connors, Eisenbert

and Sharpe (1964) have pointed out that in their studies medication did not improve the academic achievement of children. So, one can conlude that drugs can adjust the child's affect for the convenience of institutional conformity, but they cannot teach children to read or do arithmetic.

Towards a Knowledge Acquisition/Sensorimotor Model of Black Children

In the first section we dealt with research pertaining to early and advanced sensorimotor development of black neonates and infants, thus, presenting a review of the literature in the area. It is my contention that, because of the advanced sensorimotor development in blacks during their early school years, educators tend to assess this fact as inappropriate behavior. In most cases we strongly believe that the educators' assessment of these children is incorrect. It is unfortunate that because of these incorrect assessments, black school children are "managed through medication". With the first two sections in mind, we will now introduce the final section towards a knowledge acquisition/sensorimotor model of Black children.

The final section will explore the notions of the so-called "third grade syndrome" and some implications for educational policy-making. In short, from the time a black child enters school to the third grade there is an increase in verbal achievement scores. However, when the same student reaches the third grade and until grade twelve there is a leveling off or slight decrease.

in verbal achievement scores. Finally, we will provide additional ... implication for educational policy makers.

Third Grade Syndrome: Teacher observations and my own experience provide enough reason to believe that black children in the United States enter school for the first time with a great deal of enthusiasm and positive spirit. From the first day of school to the point where they reach third grade, there is a general upswing in their academic achievement. From about the third grade through the upper grades there is a steady decline in group measured capabilities of black children to do school work.

This decline is more consistent among groups of black children in the South than in the North. Why does this differentiation prevail? I suspect that one possible cause is the general restraint that the southern classroom atmosphere might impose upon children. During normal times these classrooms promote an atmosphere that is somewhere between the northern early childhood, and secondary school environment. That is, not as free and open as the lower grades of northern schools, but not as controlled and traditional as their upper grades either.

There have been interventions in early childhood education to enrich the educational opportunities for low income black children. During 1965, for example, many states inaugurated some form of Headstart. Its effects were not felt in the schools until some time later, but parents and human

service workers in many areas became more involved in how their schools were being run. How this affected the academic achievement of children recruited for these programs remains controversial.

Teaching strategies and delivery of basic education in our country is generally stratified according to teacher training modes. Early childhood teachers grades (K-3), seem to receive deeper and more concentrated training than do elementary grades (K-6) and secondary education grades (7-12) teachers. Early childhood education has been a strong movement in our country for some time and has received greater attention from parents than any other aspect of public schooling.

Risking excessive over-simplification, I will attempt to describe briefly the major modes of classroom teaching by defining the roles of the teacher and learner in their school environment. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning define an active role for the teacher and a passive role for the learner. Emphasis is placed upon objective drill and rote memorization. Curriculum content as devised by specialists and the child's ability to memorize it is paramount in this method. Stimulus-Response theorists help support this learning theory in institutions where many of our present-day teachers were trained.

Using the ideas first expressed by John Dewey in 1916, there are still remaining <u>progressive</u> <u>educators</u> and those who support learning by

discovery. This term is not a very good one for identifying this group, but it is the best one I have, so keep in mind that they are on the opposite end of a continuum from the traditionalists.

Here, the role of the learner is very active. He is allowed to explore the entire learning environment and make his own choices. Should he need clarification of an event or description of materials, the teacher's role is to respond to his queries. Teachers are passive and usually wait until the learner activates them. Unfortunately, progressive activist tend to read too little of what Dewey intended, that is, environmental passivity is now what he actually intended.

Traditionalists assume that teachers are all-knowing and that learners come to the experience lacking in almost all things until the teacher enlightens them. Progressive educators stress the learners as being in the most strategic position to determine their own needs so that they should be allowed to learn by discovery.

The open education movement seems to avoid the two extremes by encouraging an active role for teacher and learner. It seems to me that this movement more closely approximates Dewey's original philosophy. From what we now know about the nature of knowledge acquisition in black infants, the open education movement is probably better suited to their needs than the other two. This movement has been on the upswing in early childhood classrooms in

the Northeast and elsewhere, since the late fifties and Figure 1 seems to attest to its effectiveness.

It is also true that over the years the general public has paid more attention to kindergarten, preschool, and nursery than any other single aspect of pre-college education and has had more written for them on the subject. The Early Childhood Movement has probably done a great deal more to expose children to a proper mix of affective and cognitive education.

There is also a higher degree of socialization and teacher-child interaction in the early childhood grades than in the others. Nurturing is a major force in the learning environment. It is within this highly socialized environment of the early grades that black children seem to progress at a regular rate of learning. It is important to note here that the right kind of socialization is being recommended, and not merely moving about the school or classroom without planned purposeful involvement. The early childhood classroom should be an efficient workroom where a child's play is viewed as work.

In a typical open classroom the teacher will introduce a central theme of study or activities which will enable children to immediately become aware of the world around them. Themes are elaborated first from the environment such as organizing chores, caring for pets and plants,

building, cooking, music, etc., and then from those aspects of the community in which the children see relationships, solve problems, and use their skills. Well organized classrooms which provide teacher-child and child-child interaction as a basic aspect of their fundamental design, are well suited to furthering academic achievement among black children.

Once out of the early childhood sphere of influence, there appears to be a steady decline in academic achievement among black children. The social interaction model found in the lower grades provides an atmosphere within which black children as a group can learn.

Figure 1 shows the relative early grade advancement among black and white children of the North and South. The chart depicts the results of a survey research project by James Coleman (1969), to document the lack of equality in American education delivery systems. It is presented here primarily to show the distinct verbal achievement differentiation through the grades between black and white children with a graphic view of the so called third grade syndrome. At the end of the early childhood period when classrooms become more restrictive and tightly organized, there is a lack of advancement in the schooling of black children.

The inferences which should be drawn from this writing is not so much in the nature of educational goals being sought, but rather in the means for achieving these goals. We need to encourage all children to

explore the unknown and not limit them to a task-oriented curriculum devised to promote quiet servitude. Too often curriculum is lock-stepped into stages of preordained advancement. This is then applied in a didactic manner, and creativity, exploration and learning adventure are stifled.

Some Selected Problems and Implications for Policy: Several selected problems which were identified by the review of the pertinent research literature in our defined delimited problem area are presented. Two theoretical ideas concerned with the education of black children are presented. A proposed knowledge acquisition/sensorimotor model is then discussed. A summary of the research is presented, some implications of individualized instruction in an open learning situation, the problems of suspensions of students, management by medication, behavior modification and advocacy are then presented. We will offer an alternative strategy which we feel ought to be investigated by educational policy decision makers.

Currently, there are two theoretical ideas concerned with the education of black children, the child as the problem or the school system as the problem. Recently the child as the problem has received a great deal of support by educational policy decision-makers. That is Jensen (1969) theorizing that inequalities in cognitive performances tend to be genetic in origin and Hunt's (1964) cultural inferiority hypothesis. The genetic model gave rise to the vocational education movement.

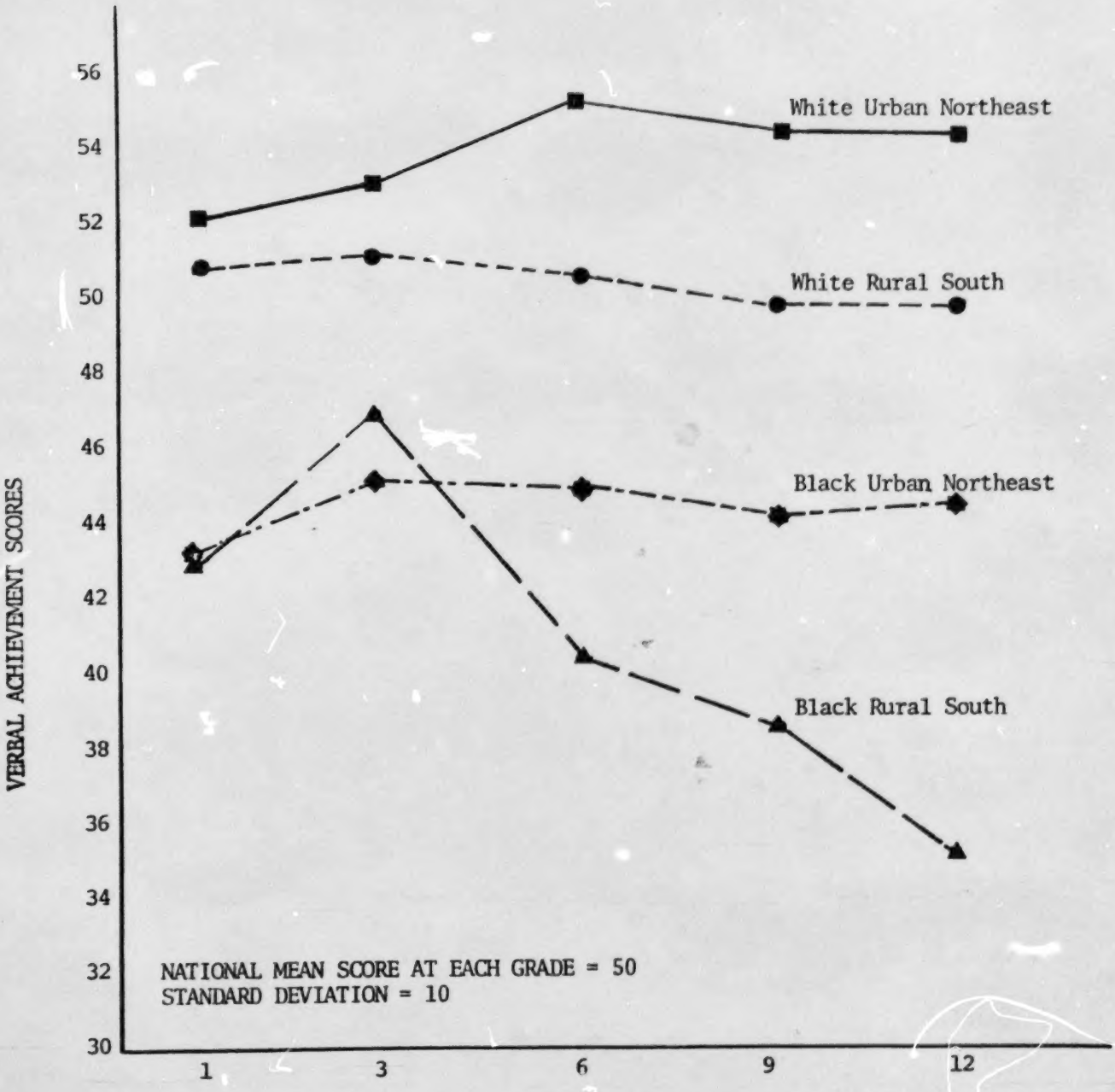

Figure 1

Patterns of Achievement in Verbal Skills at Various Grade Levels and Regions

The cultural inferiority hypothesis was the policy basis for the compensatory education programs such as Head Start and Follow Through.

During the past decade the notion that what happens in the school may be more responsible for negative outcomes than inherent characteristics of the student has been suggested by Clark (1965). From this idea three hypotheses have been generated. They are the "culture-gap", "inequality" and "self-fulling prophesy" hypotheses. The "culture-gap" hypothesis states that the values and status of teachers tend to be incongruent with those of their students.

The "inequality hypothesis" asserts that school systems do not distribute resources equitably, that is, middle-class schools are favored in assignment of staff, classes, materials and other resources. The Serrano V. Priest (1971) case challenged the constitutionality of unequal allocation of resources in education and the California Supreme Court agreed.

Finally, the "self-fulling prophecy" hypothesis suggests that, students tend to achieve at the level expected of them by their teachers. That is, if a teacher holds a student in low esteem and has low expectations for these students' success, teachers will teach in an indifferent manner and convey negative attitudes in a number of ways. The students will sense this and gauge their own expectations for success and performance accordingly.

None of the above mentioned hypotheses, theories and/or models can explain why black children tend to do poorly in our schools. We are, therefore, suggesting a Knowledge Acquisition/Sensorimotor (KA/S) model of the black child as learner.

In summary, the available research asserts that, the infant rearing practice of social interaction among Zambian mothers differed from the interaction Brazelton, Koslowski and Tronick (1971) observed between American white mothers and their newborns. Other studies in the United States which reported advanced sensorimotor development in black neonates also suggested a different style of infant handling in low income families. Other researchers found advanced motor development in those black infants whose mothers had low SES, when they were compared to infants of middle income black families. While another, found advance motoric development in all of the New Haven black infants that she compared to groups of Puerto Rican and white infants.

The research literature indicated that black children at birth anticipate an environment that will be active, including a high level of mother-infant interaction. It also suggests that white infants anticipate a less active environment with lower inputs of mother-infant interaction. Based on these data, we can assume that white children require lower levels of social interaction than their black counterparts. Our schooling patterns for the most part promote quietness and docility.

If we pursue the implications of these circumstances, that is, our classrooms are designed to suit learning norms of children from white families and opposed to the natural characteristics of certain black children. If this is true, public schooling is making it increasingly difficult for these black children to comply with the demands made upon them by that system. The fact that these children seem to establish their own set of behavior norms to which individuals and groups can conform should not surprise us. Their behavior can be disruptive when the planned environment for learning is lacking in elements which ought to serve to defuse their buildup of sensorimotor energy.

As adults, we become frustrated when a utility company or department store seems uninterested in a problem we might have with them, or unwilling to resolve it in our favor. We can become assertive and even hostile, when in our view, they are not as impressed with our problem as we are. When learners interpret a teacher's teaching behavior as not really interested in what they are feeling and needing, they too tend to become rude and boisterous. For them it is more than a simple phone call to the manager, it is going against a system which has the support of all levels of school administration, their neighborhood and often their family.

Despite the lack of educational research or training for teachers in this area, some classroom teachers have become aware of this phenomenon on their own. To improve learning for their children small groups of teachers

around the country have begun to individualize their instruction. It is one of the more organized approaches to changing a sometimes sterile, socially inactive classroom into a more sensitive and open atmosphere that promotes individual creativity. Often, untraditional patterns must be introduced. The probability that this will occur is one of the more attractive aspects of individualized instruction. Teachers who are seriously involved in this method seem to constantly search for means of expanding the number of ways to enable children to define themselves positively as persons and learners.

Educators know (but often act as if they do not), that learners are not merely cognitive receptacles but they bring affective attributes to the learning environment. Through an interacting process they demonstrate anxieties, fears, motivations, beliefs and wishes, just to name a few. Schooling also means group, rather than individual learning. Learning then is also influenced by group traditions, attitudes, and behavior norms through the same process. Many educators have written a great deal about middle-class oriented classrooms and the need for special planning when learners come from low-income families. The notion that classroom management is opposed to certain of the black child's natural attributes introduces another negative dimension which further widens this gap. In other words, in our educational delivery systems we are not only meeting white youth more than half way, but in so doing, we are moving away from the terminals at which black children expect to connect.

Docile management and demands for quietude produce sterile classrooms where many black children, mostly males, disengage from the mainstream of class discussions and academic assignments. Teachers become resentful when students balk at "school work". A troubled teacher-pupil relationship is the outcome. The resentful teacher and balking student's interactions erode with daily incidents, as when nonconforming students are denied privileges which are granted to their conforming counterparts.

Schools have adopted a policy designed to rid themselves of so called, "trouble makers", who even though they never commit serious offenses, are considered "problems". Such a policy leads to the compilation of a dossier on these students so as to build up a string of minor offenses, which when presented all at once, appear to be a massive campaign of misdeeds.

For the more youthful and consistent "offenders", there are special classrooms where cognitive expectations are usually nil. Ironically, such classes are frequently referred to as "learning centers" and under the control of muscular male teachers. Several years ago it was a common spectacle in predominantly white schools to see the majority of black male students herded into one room ruled over by the single black male teacher in the school. Or, the assignment of a paraprofessional or teacher aide to administer to the active black children with whom the classroom teacher did not care to deal because she did not know how to do it.

The Children's Defense Fund, a project of the Washington Research Project, compiled statistics directly related to this subject. They reported this year that more than one million children were suspended from school one or more times during the 1972-73 academic year. There did not seem to be any substantial differential based on geographic location, size of school district, city or state. More than 63% of the suspensions were for minor offenses such as cutting into the lunch line, smoking, truancy and similar acts. Less than 3% were for serious acts of destruction, criminal activity, or use of narcotics. In those districts from which their statistics were derived, one out of every 24 students was suspended. For black secondary school children, the suspension rate was one out of every eight. Suspension forces children into the streets where little good and probably a great deal of harm can result. It is a popular all-purpose tool used by school personnel to get rid of students which they do not know how to deal with.

A more devastating practice discussed previously, is the administration of drugs intended for children described as hyperactive. It is likely that some children attending school need help in controlling certain purposeless behavior because self management is beyond their own capability. It is not likely, however, that a classroom teacher will have the medical knowledge necessary for diagnosis and treatment. This is further complicated by lack of knowledge in this field even by competent medical persons. Despite these circumstances, identifications and referrals are solely the domain of the

of the teacher to initiate. Among professionals, favorable networks are relatively easy to set into place. Physicians who are prone to prescribe drug therapy are soon known and parents are encouraged to seek advice from these sources.

All that is really known about the practice of behavior modification by medication at this time, is that the commonly used medications quiet children who are unusually disruptive and active. There are no data, or known scientific investigations, on the dangers of drug build up over the years or the possibilities for future addiction. We do know, that by far, the larger percentage of prescribed behavior modifying drugs are administered to black male children. It is my view that such practices are detrimental. How severe such detriments might be is a separate concern worthy of its own investigation. My own interest of the moment, however rests on the notion that the behavior being modified is probably more purposeful for children on their terms, than the behaviors that are being called forth through the use of medication (because children are powerless, etc.).

Too many of the innercity and rural poor are powerless in encouraging our system to work for their betterment. They want a better life but their problems are too many and too large and their resources too few to change their condition. They have too little time, not enough knowledge, too few skills, and not enough influence. For the most part they are alone

with their problems; if unaided, they cannot cope with their family responsibilities or with the demands of the institutions which are designed to advance their interests.

Black children from these families, and others who may appear to be somewhat better off, are often discouraged by institutions they use and from which they derive certain benefits. Too often their experience or their interpretation of an experience make them believe that these institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) are alien and hostile.

Despite these circumstances, there are many children from upper socio-economic black families whose adaptation and academic achievement seem to follow a pathway similar to that of white children from middle income families of equal status. For several generations they may have lived among white families and socialized with them in significant ways that reduced social distance; even in such taboo areas as interracial mate choice. The latter continues to crumble gradually among upper income persons.

Within opportunity and social mobility domains, black families who are gradually becoming "better off" are also widening the gap between themselves and lower income blacks whose status remains the same. The better off blacks are often thrust into this status on the basis of a comparison between <u>two adult incomes</u> in their family, and <u>one adult</u>

income in a similar white family. Nevertheless, it appears that through increased sharing of jobs and social interaction of rituals (parties, holiday celebrations, marriages and similar ceremonial occasions), certain upper income black children achieve in our present modes of schooling equally to their white counterparts. It is not known whether or not they might do better in a more active environment.

Then there is that recurring popular question: if these black children can do well through common modes of teaching, why should we not expect others to do the same? The three implications here are that the institution is on the right track but certain learners are not. Firstly, the apparatus for adaptation and then assimilation is not available to all. Innercity housing project dwellers, for example, hardly see whites outside of a power relationship where blacks are the powerless. So, one to one interactions are rare. Secondly, teachers need to be able to tap into the child's steady stream of consciousness without diverting or damming it up. Being insensitive to an active style of learning can very easily send the learner underground. Thirdly, adaptation to what is, should not constitute the whole of what we should be striving for in the education of our young. We should be continuously searching for ways to enable children to define themselves positively as persons and as learners.

Although or emphasis has been upon implications for policy matters affecting infants in families and their schooling, it is hoped that other

questions along the life span will be brought to the interest of other investigators. Issues of social interaction pertaining to the care of institutionalized, orphaned and abandonded infants, early adult life, and residency in homes for the elderly, are some of the categories related to a life span view.

In summary, there seems to be five alternative courses of action which school personnel are likely to put into motion in dealing with black children who are too active to learn comfortably in the established school order. Rather than re-examine modes of teaching/learning styles for possible modification, the education establishment prefers to (1) assign children to special learning centers where only minimal learning is expected, or (2) prescribe drugs to render children affectless and almost void of emotion to sequester their classroom behavior, (3) completely separate children from their school environment by suspension, or (4) don't do anything, keep things the way they are. The four courses of action are demeaning and hurtful. The fifth is to apply a humanistic, open individualized learning situation for all students.

Towards A Theory Of Selected Knowledge Acquisition Patterns Among Black Children

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